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ABSTRACT

As the population ages and school enrollments shrink, nonparents are making more and more of the financial decisions affecting schools. Schools that involve all of their publics, parent and nonparent, and keep them informed have community support. Those who fail to reach beyond their parent publics do not. This volume is a collection of a cross section of ideas for reaching nonparents and bringing them back into the schools. Advice is offered on identifying nonparent publics, reaching nonparents, and developing a plan of action. Other examples include bringing business representatives into the school, starting community education programs, and recruiting volunteers to participate in school activities. Ideas are suggested for bringing the schools to their communities through a variety of media as well as through district publications, public demonstrations and displays, speakers' bureaus, and cable television programming. Finally, the involvement of senior citizens is stressed for the "important human and historical connection" that they can share with children. (Author/MLF)

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# Non-Parents and Schools: Creating a New Team

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National School Public Relations Association

# Acknowledgement

*Non-Parents and Schools: Creating A New Team* is one of a series of Communication Alert handbooks published by The National School Public Relations Associations (NSPRA). The handbook is designed to provide school administrators, board of education members, communication specialists, and concerned educational leaders with practical examples of programs involving non-parents—almost 72% of the adults in most communities across the nation in the 1980s.

The volume is a collection of a cross section of ideas for reaching non-parents and bringing them back into the schools. School districts which involve all of their publics, parent and non-parent, and keep them informed, have community support. Those who fail to reach beyond their parent publics do not.

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# Introduction

If half of what we hear and read of taxpayers' unwillingness to support schools is true—and it certainly is—the continued existence of public education in this country is threatened.

If public education is to survive, administrators, working with their public relations personnel, can no longer rely on parents who have children in their schools to win the support they need. **They must reach out and involve non-parents**—those adults in the community with no children or who no longer have children in school.

William Raspberry, columnist for the *Washington Post,* finds public support for public education is flagging as a result of frustration over failing test scores, conflicts over national priorities, taxpayer revolts and the recognition that education is not a panacea to cure every social ill.

"The failing commitment to the public schools," Raspberry continues, "is bad enough under any circumstances, but it is made worse by the fact declining birth rates will reduce the number of young people available to do the nation's increasingly complex work."

At the other end of the spectrum is an aging population with no ties to public education. This group, receiving most of its information about schools from the mass media, is making the decisions about the future of education and the level of financial support it will have. And, it is this population, with little firsthand knowledge of local schools, which is defeating school measures by margins of 2 to 1 in vote-by-mail trials in California and Oregon.

Recently a suburban Portland, Oregon, school district went name by name through registered voter lists to find out how many of the parents were registered to vote. The results showed fewer than 50 percent were registered. The district then looked at the printout of names of those who had voted in school elections and found fewer than 50 percent of the registered parents had voted.

In this community, if all parents comprise approximately 20 percent of the population, if they were all registered to vote, they would still only represent 30 percent of the registered voters! This means, even if all parents were registered, they would not have a majority voice at the polls in determining the level of financial support their children will receive.

If you look, you will find this Portland district is typical of many communities nationwide.

## Trends in Citizens' Attitudes

Declining public school enrollments, diminishing numbers of public school parents and steadily increasing numbers of adults with no school age children combine to become "partly responsible for a decreasing public confidence in education," according to education pollster Ned S. Hubbell, of the Michigan State Board of Education.

Hubbells, report of trends in citizens' attitudes toward education in the decade of the '70s are the result of more than 100 opinion polls conducted by his own former Michigan-based polling firm for school districts throughout the nation.

Demographic data in each of ten successive Gallup polls support Hubbell's findings. Ten years ago, 44 percent of the adults in this country had children in public schools. In 1980, the U.S. Census showed only 28 percent were public school parents and better than two out of three adults had no children of school age.

**By 1990, the U.S. Census Bureau projects the number of people age 55 and over will be larger than the entire K-12 school population. And, if present trends continue, one out of every five Americans will be at least 55 by the turn of the century.**

Unfortunately, as this phenomenon has developed, educators, by-and-large, have failed to see the importance of expanding their information networks beyond a dwindling circle of parents and friends.

Consequently, says Hubbell, "there's a growing information gap between the public schools and the majority of the public." While 54 percent of the parents feel well-informed about schools, four out of ten non-parents admit to not knowing very much about schools.

The reason parents feel knowledgeable about schools, and non-parents feel just the opposite, is due to their sources of information. **For parents, the number one source of information is their children,** "and that hasn't changed in eight years," Hubbell points out. Next, they rely on the mass media and this is "up significantly

. . . it was fourth, five years ago." The third source is teachers and other employees; fourth, word-of-mouth from other people; and fifth, school district publications.

**For non-parents, the mass media continue to be the primary source,** with word-of-mouth from other people moving into second place this year. The other three major sources of information for non-parents are someone's children, school district publications, and teachers and other school employees.

What people want to know from their schools shows that parents and non-parents share mutual information needs and interests.

- **What's being taught and learned in schools is the number one area of interest.** This includes curriculum content priorities and emphasis, especially in basic skills; more about student progress, test results and proof of results. A special interest is in information about curriculum from the secondary schools.
- **How basic subjects are taught**—especially in reading instructions and math skills—includes a need for information about teaching methods, techniques, etc.
- **How school funds are spent** covers budget priorities and the determination of those priorities. Currently, Hubbell's studies show that one out of every five adults gives the schools a "poor" rating in informing citizens about financial matters.
- **How the school board operates and reaches decisions** is a new area of interest. Citizens want to know how the board arrives at policies and what procedures are used. Very few people really understand the role, powers, duties and limitations of school boards.

The news media, which, as Hubbell shows, more and more of our publics are depending on for information about schools, carry information about these topics critically or not at all. But, if you look closely at this coverage, you will find they do so more often from lack of information from school administrators than from lack of space or interest from readers.

Nickie McWhirter, of the *Detroit Free Press*, sums up the situation in a column published October 23, 1981:

> I wasn't surprised when Taylor (Michigan) taxpayers turned down a school millage request this week and said, in effect, nuts to the schools and everybody in them. I wasn't surprised when Alpena residents did the same thing and let their schools close for lack of money.
>
> Today's school crises were set in motion a long time ago. Most educators and school boards saw them coming, but few schools did anything to change the ominous scenario.
>
> The trouble is community non-involvement in the schools, coupled with burgeoning inflation-recession. The inflation-recession part would not be critical if it were not for the community non-involvement part. At least that's what I think, and I'll explain the dynamics.
>
> The traditional view of schools—that they are something useful and valuable that a community and society ought to support—is simplistic. Everybody knows that. It's inflexible and idealistic. Everybody knows that too. Now it has been seriously challenged and rejected. How come?
>
> All the above means that fewer and fewer young adults have any direct, personal stake in schools and what goes on in the classroom. There is a philosophical, ethical, moral, theoretical interest in schools, perhaps, but nothing that directly touches their lives or makes them want to spend money on public education.
>
> Besides, these impersonal, bureaucratic institutions with fewer and fewer kids to teach, keep asking us for more and more money. Then they graduate kids who can't read or write or figure checkbook balances. Nuts to schools.
>
> I suggest that this is the mind of the public these days and that the inflation-recession crunch is just the excuse for voting "no" on millage increases. The true reason for voting "no" is public alienation. The solution is to get old folks in the classroom with kids. It is to get non-parents involved with kids. It is to instill in a community a sense that the school offers something for everybody and needs everybody, not just everybody's money. That's a tough order.

It is, as McWhirter says, "a tough order," but one schools are undertaking successfully in communities across the country. This booklet is designed to share these good ideas with you.

There are some bright spots. Most Americans do believe in education. **Nearly three out of every ten Americans are currently involved in educational activities** according to the report of the Technical Committee on Creating an Integrated Society: Implications for Educational Systems from the 1981 White House Conference on Aging.

**Twenty-seven percent of the population is engaged in providing educational services of one kind or another.**

Of those not directly providing educational services, there is a growing feeling the public should be more involved in how schools are run.

"The American household is still highly education oriented and its support for public education can and must be won," according to David Snyder, consulting futurist and strategic planner of Bethesda, Md. "Schools should take the hint from social indicators which show people want more control over their existence, interesting work and opportunities for life-long learning to develop a public awareness of the school's function as a local public utility."

**Fairfax County (Va.) Public Schools are doing this. They describe their schools as providing services to young and old alike:**

- **Day care centers**
- **Adult education courses**
- **Senior citizen lunches, social gatherings**

**Schools have open doors from morning 'til night:**

- **Breakfast programs**
- **Recreational and athletic events**
- **Performing arts productions, theater groups**
- **Public meetings, community organizations**

**Schools continue in service after 'school's out' in the summer months:**

- **Summer school**
- **Enrichment institutes**
- **Driver education**
- **Special education services**
- **English-as-a-second-language programs**

Your schools can do this too. The potential is there. The job can be done. We must begin now.

The way to begin is to identify key audiences among non-parent groups to determine their level of information about your schools, and then to develop a plan of action to get them informed and involved.

## Identifying Non-Parent Publics

*OK, you say, the handwriting is on the wall. This year you are going to direct your communications efforts at non-parents.*

To begin, you need to define non-parent. If by non-parent you mean residents of your district who have no children or who no longer have children in school, your definition is correct but too broad to concentrate your communications efforts effectively.

What you should do is list specific non-parent publics you want to reach (e.g., senior citizens, businesses, young marrieds, singles, career people, pre-school parents).

Now break each of these publics into target groups. For example under Senior Citizens you might list:

1. Residents whose children are grown but continue to live in their homes in your district.
2. Grandparents of the children in your school.
3. Senior Citizens at the local community center.
4. Residents who live in one or several condominium developments in your district.
5. Senior Citizens confined to full-time care facilities.

Or, under businesses list:

1. Those which support schools by advertising in school programs.
2. Business representatives who belong to local service clubs.
3. Businesses which happen to be within the boundaries of your district.
4. Businesses which hire high school students.
5. Businesses in the greater area which send speakers to schools for career education programs.

Chapter I

# Identifying Non-Parent Publics

*Once you have your lists you will need to find out where these groups are in your community; who the individuals, especially the opinion leaders, are in each of these groups; how much they know about your schools; and how they get their information.*

There are many community resources which can help you locate non-parents and find out something about them. These resources include:

1. **1980 Census data which is available by census tract.** Tracts may not coincide exactly with your district boundaries but will generally come close enough to give you good data about your area.

   For at least the next few years, the 1980 census data will give you a fair indication of:
   - The population in your area
   - The average age of residents
   - The level of education
   - The average number of persons per household
   - An indication of income
   - Females employed (16 and over)
   - Labor Force Categories (professional and management, sales, service workers, laborers, farmers, etc.)
2. **Local planning commissions** which are continually updating information about cities, counties and unincorporated areas within their jurisdictions. Planning Commission data include population projections based on the number of single and multi-family dwellings within census tracts as well as current zoning regulations.
3. **The post office** can tell you how many residences and businesses there are on postal routes within your district. If you find the right person, you may be able to determine where the apartment houses are and which areas are single family residential.

The post office can also tell you how many changes of address there are in your area each month, and how many new addresses are added to routes each month. (Water and power companies have similar data and sometimes will let you copy names and addresses for informational mailings.) Postal route maps are also helpful for any project which may require door-to-door distribution of materials, or for preparation and distribution of district or attendance-area bulk mailings.

4. **Chambers of commerce,** city directories, telephone business directories, or firms which prepare mailing lists can help you build mailing lists for the businesses within your district or locate certain types of businesses in the greater area around you.

   But before you start building a new list of businesses do an inventory of the businesses you already know. Ask each principal, counselor and coach to list the businesses they have contacted for any reason. Ask the high school to list businesses that support athletic programs, hire students, serve on career education advisory committees. On a second list have principals ask their staffs to name the businesses within the district. Be sure these lists include barber shops, beauty parlors, bars, dentists and doctors as well as stores.

5. **Election records.** If your goal in involving non-parents in your schools is to assure support for school measures at the polls, then take a look at voting records too.

   County election offices can provide you with computer printouts of the names and addresses of those who vote in school elections. Election offices also maintain, in various forms, lists of those who vote regularly in a given year. For example, at the end of a calendar year, you might request the printout of all those who voted in special elections during the year. Then have principals develop lists of those who vote regularly in their attendance area to use as a base list for making community contacts.

The resources listed here for locating non-parents are available in every community. Others are also available. As you begin to do your research, you will find additional resources available in your area. The key to finding them will be listening to people in the agencies listed above tell you where they got some of their data.

As soon as you have located the non-parent groups within your community and have decided, based on your research, those you most want to reach, you will need to find out how much the individuals in each of these groups know about your schools and where they get their information.

Formal and informal community surveys can help:

1. Identify people who have things to say about a variety of issues, especially schools.
2. Give you a representative sample of these people's opinions from which you can gain useful impressions of their attitudes about your schools.
3. Gain practical information for short and long range planning.
4. Get you started on organizing a continuous program of survey feedback.

A most effective informal means of gathering data on what people know about schools and where they get their information is to develop a key communicator network within your targeted non-parent group. Key communicators are not only excellent sources of information but they are also excellent communicators when kept well-informed.

**Key communicators can be those in your identified non-parent groups who talk to people regularly.** Identify them and invite them in. Tell them about your schools in two hours or less. Listen carefully to the kinds of questions they ask. Put them on a VIP mailing list. And ask them to call you if they need school information, have a question or hear a rumor. Key communicator groups can be a few people or hundreds. Complete information on developing key communicator networks is available from the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA).

The next step is planning a program which will bring non-parent publics into the schools or bring your schools to these non-parent publics. With the information you have gathered here, you should be ready to develop your own specific plan of action.

Chapter 2

# Developing a Plan of Action

*You're ready. You know who the non-parent publics in your community are. You've found out what they know about your schools and are they misinformed! You're going to show them. You'll get them all into your schools so they can see for themselves how great things really are. If they won't come, you'll bring the schools to them.*

First, slow down. Start with one group, one or a series of activities and do them well. Involve key school district people in the planning and execution of the plan.

Second, consider as you plan some of the following marketing concepts school districts are beginning to use with good results.

These people also have a mental image of your schools and district based on how the school or district is positioned in their minds.

## Positioning Your District

"Positioning is a relatively new marketing concept. It deals with the images in our minds and has a lot to do with school communication," says William J. Banach, ASPR, administrative assistant, Communications and Management, Macomb Intermediate School District, Mt. Clemens, Michigan.

"The positioning process begins when marketing experts analyze the lifestyles of their target audiences. They look at how these people live and what they believe. Next they attach their message to a belief or value the target audiences already have to something already in one of the mental compartments. Then they nail down the position they want with communication."

"Positioning makes consumers associate words, thoughts and feelings with products and services. (Avis said "We try harder." McDonald's exclaims "Nobody can do it ... like McDonald's can." And Ford still "... has a better idea.") Positioning helps determine what we believe. It helps influence our buying decisions and creates an identity motivating us to act."

"Proper positioning works for schools, too. It can help create an image so that people hearing about your schools think of them as 'the places that really care about kids' or 'the teacher with the terrific reading program' or 'the administration that is really on the ball' instead of 'a place where people work only nine months of the year' or 'where all our tax dollars go.' "

Part of positioning is determining your unique selling proposition—what is it that makes your district different—not better—than other districts. Then put your proposition into words like "Teaching Basics Better to all Students is a Tradition." A school district in Michigan heralds . . . "Your Public Schools . . . There's no better place to learn."

*Communication Briefings* Volume 1, Number 2, December 1981, lists the following suggestions:

**Slogans are effective devices for transmitting a message in capsule form. If repeated often enough, these attention-getting phrases are remembered and indelibly associated with your company, organization, product or service. Here are some guidelines for creating successful slogans:**

- **Avoid using more than seven words. That's the maximum number people can comfortably remember.**
- **Don't incorporate more than one main idea. You'll diffuse the impact.**
- **Decide on the idea before trying to create the slogan. Try to sum it up in a single sentence.**
- **When writing the slogan, use verbal devices such as:**
  - **—Alliteration (Ruffles have ridges)**
  - **—Paradox (You're not getting older, you're getting better)**
  - **—Metaphor (Vicks tackles the tickles)**
  - **—Play on words (For soft babies and baby-soft hands)**
  - **—Rhyme (Bounty. The quicker picker-upper)**
  - **—Analogy (Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there)**
  - **—Pun (Every litter bit helps)**
  - **—Contrast (Ben-Gay. When you hurt, it helps)**

Your slogan can become a theme for rallying community interest and involvement in public schools.

"The theme 'Education is a Family Affair' literally became a household word; the concept, a fact of life," in Duval County (Fla.) Schools according to James E. Lashley, ASPR, director of communications.

The focus of the campaign was an all-out effort to bring citizens into all 134 Duval County schools through a series of open house programs. Two open house efforts in 1978–79 brought 50,000 adult participants respectively into the schools. In September 1979, open house attendance grew to 60,000 and in 1980 attendance was up to 71,600. **In 1981, attendance was 99,679—more adults than there are students in Duval County Schools.**

The project has a purpose: Bring citizens into the schools. And, it was well planned by Superintendent Herb A. Sang and his staff and had the support of building principals and their staffs.

**The Duval plan's ultimate success depended upon total community support. When asked, real estate brokers, ministers, news media and school volunteers responded enthusiastically. Promotional efforts included:**

- **Outdoor billboards (space donated by businesses)**
- **Commercial advertising**
- **Newspaper feature articles**
- **Electric advertising signs**
- **Lapel stickers worn by grocery clerks, bankers, etc.**
- **Bumper stickers**
- **Company publications (articles/ads)**
- **Presentations to civic groups**
- **Support of ministers from the pulpit**
- **Posters (8½" × 11") distributed in public places**
- **Bag stuffers used in grocery stores, etc.**
- **Public service announcements on radio and TV**
- **Individual telephone calls to each home**
- **School secretary phone-answering messages ("Don't forget to attend.")**
- **Plugs by radio disc jockeys between records**
- **Stuffers distributed with electric bills, etc.**
- **Mayor's proclamation of Educational Involvement Week**
- **Distribution of materials through booths in shopping centers**
- **Prize/contest for schools with highest attendance**

Banach suggests the use of brainstorming as one way to generate good ideas for building-level or for district plans to bring non-parents into the schools. He lists these steps:

1. Get your staff—all your staff (professional and support)—together.
2. Mix people up. Don't let people who work together sit together. Groups of 4–6 people are best.
3. The person in each group whose last name is closest to A is the chairperson; closest to Z is the recorder.
4. Pick the topic(s) you want to brainstorm. (For example, how to improve communication with non-parents.)
5. Give participants the rules for brainstorming:
   - **No criticism.** Brainstorming is designed to generate the greatest number of ideas in the least amount of time. No matter how impossible, unrealistic or 'stupid' an idea appears, the chairperson is not to allow criticism (e.g., "the superintendent will never go for it.")
   - **Free-wheeling is welcomed.** The wilder the idea the better. It's easier to tame down a suggestion than it is to tune it up.
   - **Quantity is the goal.** Let participants brainstorm for 5–10–15 minutes. Make sure they've exhausted the topic before you stop.
   - **Piggy-backing is encouraged.** Encourage people to add a new twist to someone else's idea.
   - **Everyone participates.** The chairperson is responsible for seeing that everyone takes part.
6. After brainstorming have each recorder read the ideas from his/her group. Then collect the ideas from each group, compile them and send a copy to each participant.
7. The next time you get together as a staff pick the ideas you like best (the top one, two or three). Then talk about who's going to do what when.

It's guaranteed, according to Banach. People enjoy being involved. They have lots of good communication ideas. And by working on the challenge together you'll find everyone committed to building better public understanding of schools through communication.

**Get ready for 100 more ideas!**

Chapter 3

# Reaching the Non-Parent

*Programs to reach non-parents have one of two objectives: either they are designed to bring individuals into the schools as visitors or volunteers; or they are designed to bring the schools to the community so that accomplishments are visible. Most successful programs combine these objectives.*

There are as many ways to meet these objectives as there are schools, teachers and administrators. Therefore the examples which follow will give you a cross-section of ideas which have worked. Some of the most successful are given in enough detail for you to use them as models.

The ultimate goal of all these activities is to develop a continuing relationship of cooperation and support for education by non-parents. Those in charge of them report these activities have done that.

## Bringing Non-Parents to the Schools

One of the most successful efforts to bring non-parents into the schools occurs in Columbus, Ohio, where 72 percent of the residents do not have school-age children. Most of these citizens have not set foot inside a school for many years and their perceptions of schools—both nationally and locally—are based on impressions, generalizations and even misinformation. To counteract this phenomenon, Superintendent Joseph L. Davis decided to work at getting non-parents inside the schools through a project he calls **"See for Yourself."**

Davis' goal is to have his 149 schools welcome 50,000 of these visitors dur ng 1981–82. To help staff accomplish this goal, Columbus Public Schools' communications department prepared a 15-minute slide presentation on Columbus Public Schools which principals can use with their guests. The department is also furnishing a steady stream of ideas to the principals to help them meet the superintendent's goal.

These ideas not only include what to do with visitors when they come to school, but also suggest ways to advertise the program in the community to get them there.

**Here are 25 "See For Yourself" ideas:**

1. Set a goal of one non-parent visitor per pupil with incentives for pupils. Have visitors sign a guest book.
2. Make a mailing list of non-parents living near your school. Have students write personal invitations and enclose a self-portrait so the visitor will recognize them.
3. Send "picketers" out to shopping centers with signs urging people to "See For Yourself," or place "See For Yourself" posters in neighborhood store fronts, other public buildings and meeting places.
4. Place a classified ad in the neighborhood paper with a "See For Yourself" invitation.
5. Send "See For Yourself" invitations to area churches to put in their weekly bulletins.
6. Get area merchants to provide "See For Yourself" coupons which can be exchanged for "freebies."
7. **Start a challenge chain**—challenge a well-known Columbusite to come to school, then ask that person to challenge another to "See For Yourself."
8. **Compose a school song.** Serenade the non-parents in your neighborhood, with an invitation to "See For Yourself."
9. Watch the birth announcements in the newspaper for addresses in your neighborhood. Send congratulatory notes along with an invitation to visit school.
10. As a class project, have students write personal invitations to a non-parent neighbor.
11. Contact employers in the vicinity of your school. Ask them to release employees for a school visit.
12. Contact real estate offices in your area and invite them to hold their next staff meeting at your school.
13. Contact business and civic organizations and suggest they tour your school in lieu of one of their monthly meetings.
14. **Invite Senior Citizens to:**
    • Attend a school event • Show their travel slides to a class • Volunteer in the library • Read to children • Eat lunch at school
15. Offer discounts or free admission to school events to Golden Buckeye Card Holders.
16. Invite Seniors to play in the school band or orchestra.
17. Hold a 1930s or '40s dance and invite non-parents.
18. Plan a staff meeting around some "How To" speaker—preparing tax returns, estate planning, family budgeting, etc.,—and invite non-parents to attend.
19. Have a "Family Day" when all the members of your school staff invite their families to visit school.
20. Contact alumni and invite them to return. Try to arrange to have some retired teachers to greet them.
21. Honor a "good citizen of the week" with an invitation to lunch or a special program.
22. Invite local craftsmen to demonstrate their crafts throughout the year. Then have students display what they learned and invite the craftsmen back.
23. Invite a disc jockey to visit the school—perhaps even do a remote broadcast.
24. If you have an empty classroom, offer it to a public health agency.
25. Use non-parents as judges for student contests.

These ideas are working well in Columbus. Public Information Officer Robert Grossman reports these "See For Yourself" ideas have brought school visitors from service clubs, business and civic associations, local hospital staffs, church groups, senior citizens, realtors, local labor union representatives, community service agencies, registered voters and school neighbors, to name just a representative sample.

School districts across the country are bringing non-parents into their schools during American Education Week or during a week they devote to demonstrations and activities with community special appeal. Tigard, Oregon, Schools hold "Visit Your Schools" week just prior to the district's annual finance election. Some districts sponsor single day activities which are well-received in their communities.

Grand Island, Nebraska, combines efforts with the local Chamber of Commerce to sponsor "ABC Day" where area residents are invited to a continental breakfast at their neighborhood school, hear administrators and teachers talk informally about schools today, and then visit in classrooms.

A popular event in the **William Penn School District** in Yeadon, Pennsylvania, is "Showcase," a one night event when every school displays the best work of students and invites parents and non-parents to review these efforts.

School Principal Donald Price from Mann Junior High School in the Clover Park School District, Tacoma, Washington, mails invitations to residents in his attendance area inviting them to the "Greatest Show in the Neighborhood"—open house at school.

Chapter 4

# Business Link to the Non-Parent

*Bringing business representatives into the schools for a tour or for any other reason, especially when those representatives include barbers, beauticians, bartenders, busdrivers, ministers, dentists and other service people who have time to talk with their customers, can be a critical component in the communications network with the non-parent.*

The kind of word-of-mouth communication these individuals can generate is, according to pollster Hubbell, the second most important source of information about schools for non-parents.

The relationship, however, is as beneficial to educational programs as it is to communication. Without it Willard Wirtz, chairman of the board of the National Manpower Institute in Washington, D.C., and former U.S. Secretary of Labor, says schools would "become isolated from the rest of the community, become isolated from the knowledge of what it takes for youth to participate in those other institutions, from how employing establishments view the developed abilities provided by the schools, from the resources throughout a community for enriching and extending the educational process."

In an *EDUCATION USA* Special Report on *Business-School Partnerships: A Plus for Kids,* Richard Lesher's five characteristics of businessmen and women that educators may overlook are listed. Lesher, president of the Chamber of Commerce of the United States, says:

1. Businessmen and women are former students.
2. Most are parents and grandparents and as such are interested in how well schools are educating their children and grandchildren.
3. They're major employers . . . more than four out of five jobs are still in the private sector.
4. They are management experts who can help educators manage their limited resources more efficiently.
5. And, they are community minded, community leaders.

Lesher should, however, have added a sixth point. **Business is a microcosm of the community as a whole.** The ratio of parents to non-parents in business is as high as it is in the community. The misinformation business people have about education is colored not only by the kinds of things they learn from mass media and hear from their neighbors and friends, but also by the kinds of applicants public schools send through their doors.

The *EDUCATION USA* Special Report lists four kinds of business-industry involvement with schools taking place throughout the country.

1. **Collaborative activities** which directly or indirectly involve students. These usually are career preparation or awareness programs, or in economic or citizenship education.
2. **Cooperative efforts** to aid schools or school districts that don't involve students. Examples include management studies, staff development, teachers in industry programs, budget preparation assistance, long range planning.
3. **Involvement by individuals from business and industry** as members of boards, committees or task forces.
4. **Education-related activities by business or industry** without the cooperation of local schools or school districts. Examples include corporate training programs, tuition aid plans for employees and instructional aid materials.

Programs under the first three kinds of involvement are especially helpful to a district's communications efforts with the larger community. School districts are finding, too, business is more than willing to be involved with schools. All that's needed is for someone to ask them.

## Teacher for a Day

For example, 21 invited guests—public officials, community leaders, school board members, two newspaper reporters, and Fort Wayne, (Ind.), school administrators—accepted a challenge to be "Teacher for a Day."

The activity paired each of the guests with a teacher for one day during American Education Week in November 1981.

When guest "teachers" met at a reception after their experience the response was positive. The two reporters who taught came away with an appreciation of the curriculum and today's teachers which they wrote about in their news stories.

## Tapping Business Expertise

In classrooms across the nation business representatives are invited to speak to students about jobs or companies as part of career-exploration programs. As students at the high school level begin to move out of the school into the working community, business representatives are asked to serve on advisory committees and to take part in a variety of work-experience programs.

In some areas of the country businesses have banded together, using their computer resources, to build lists of speakers and business services schools can draw from for career programs. School districts with access to county-wide computer facilities have the capability of compiling similar data for use by all districts in the county.

## Partnerships-in-Education

In a more comprehensive effort to establish working relationships with business Pittsburgh (Pa.) Public Schools established a "Partnerships-in-Education" program as a collaboration of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, the Greater Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce and the school district. The program was modeled after successful programs in Boston, Dallas, Miami, Minneapolis and Cincinnati.

In each of these communities the partnership program recognizes schools as a critical ingredient to the city's future. Consequently, the goal of these partnerships is to enrich the educational experiences of students through the sharing of community resources and expertise.

In Pittsburgh "Partnerships-in-Education" is a voluntary one-to-one pairing of a business or corporation with a school. Representatives from the company and the school work together to assess school needs, to examine ways of meeting those needs and to plan activities.

Among the more typical programs are classroom speakers, visits to company plants and offices, "shadow an employee day," career counseling, loans and donations of equipment, financial support, student and teacher internships and assistance with curriculum planning.

Jane Zielinski, coordinator of the "Pittsburgh Partnerships in Education" program, assists schools and business partners in developing new projects. As part of that assistance she has compiled a list of 45 ways schools can involve business representatives and resources. You may want to use some of these suggestions to develop programs of your own:

## 45 Ideas for School/Business Partnerships

1. Employment readiness courses or workshops
2. Special skill-training classes possibly leading to job with company
3. Personnel office representatives serving as employment consultants
4. Contribute to school scholarship funds
5. Employees serving as advisers in school programs
6. A co-op program where company provides part-time work for students
7. Provide technical assistance for school newspaper, yearbook or other publication
8. Leadership training for student leaders, faculty and administrators
9. Company tours for students and teachers
10. Day-on-the-job with company employees
11. Participate in tutoring programs for remedial, gifted or handicapped students
12. Offer the services of company speakers bureau for classes and assembly programs
13. Sponsor in-service workshops in special curriculum areas
14. Encourage student groups to perform in company
15. Company-sponsored trips for students
16. Career seminars for students
17. Provide special services such as films, tapes, etc. on various topics
18. Make company educational program material available to teachers
19. Conduct seminars for teachers who want to update knowledge in particular area
20. Help produce booklets for students on particular career opportunities

21. Help to establish a resource room for college and career information
22. Work with school guidance counselors to establish a job placement program
23. Provide local parent-teacher-student associations with material for meetings
24. Work with school staff to develop a teacher and/or student handbook
25. Contribute to academic and athletic recognition ceremonies
26. Develop a special subject directory for teachers
27. Conduct a local survey of employment opportunities
28. Help with resources for pilot programs or courses
29. Donate used equipment
30. Provide guest speakers for classes, assemblies or commencement
31. Provide guidance counselors with updated job information
32. Sponsor student clubs
33. Provide summer jobs or internships for students and teachers
34. Make contributions to the school library
35. Help start a film library or foreign language lab
36. Provide consultants for a basic personal finance workshop for seniors
37. Offer time management session for all school personnel
38. Sponsor special student projects (class plays, anti-litter campaign, etc.)
39. Coordinate a "Take Pride in Your School" week with school administrators
40. Provide health awareness seminars, booklets, films
41. Provide trainer for standard first aid course
42. Provide company space for student arts and crafts display
43. Make an effort to do something special during American Education Week
44. Have employees serve as judges for essay, oratorical and school related contests
45. Suggest that employees with a knowledge of a certain subject serve on school curriculum committee

## In-School Explorer Post

Schools are also getting help in reaching business from unusual sources. In a pilot project at David Douglas High School in Portland, Oregon, the Columbia Pacific Council region of the Boy Scouts of America is sponsoring in-school Explorer Posts. The post provides career awareness and encourages a close link between the high school and local employers in specific vocational areas (e.g., food service, industrial metals, horticulture, business office operations).

All of the students in a vocational class are post members. They plan the kinds of programs they want and devote one class session every other week to post meetings. Post activities include guest speakers and field trips.

## School-Wide Corporation

Many schools use business models for organizing vocational programs to simulate the kinds of experiences students will encounter on the job. The Lincoln Park Elementary School in Portland, Oregon, has formed a school-wide corporation with some unique and beneficial results.

In 1970, the school opened a Career Interest Center with funds from a three-year federal grant. Activities offered by the Center were popular. When funds ran out in 1973, teachers began searching for a way to continue the program.

They proposed to the student body that they cooperate in forming a corporation to fund and manage the center and school store. The corporation was to be supported by annual stock sales to students with a limit of four shares per student at a selling price of 25¢ per share, and fund raising activities.

A local bank helped the school with the financial organization of the corporation and provided materials to set the fifth grade up as the accounting department.

This very successful, student owned and operated company has an annual budget of $8,000 and returns a 20 percent dividend to its stockholders at the end of the year.

The nine-member board of directors with separate responsibilities for activities, sales, finance, school store, and advertising deals with vendors, directors and visitors in a businesslike manner which has given the school a reputation for excellence in academics and discipline.

## Patron Tours

Bringing non-parents into schools for a tour takes a great deal of planning, cajoling and patience until the ball gets rolling says Vancouver (Wash.) Schools Public Information Officer Harold Millen. In Vancouver, the five-times yearly tour of the district is primarily for business representatives and non-parents.

At least 25 people take the tour each time it is offered. According to testimonials in a thick file of thank you letters, the tour pays big dividends in changing attitudes about and building support for Vancouver schools. In fact, several companies now require new managers to take the tour as part of their orientation to the community.

The tours are designed to show patrons the business side of running schools as well as give them a glimpse of the educational program. The tours are also designed to cover a lot of territory and information in a short period of time—two and a half to three hours.

In Vancouver the tour includes:

- A briefing by the superintendent on the overall operation of the school district.
- A tour of the business office and other business functions in the administration building as well as the warehouse and bus garage.
- Stops are made at an elementary school, a special education program for the physically handicapped, and the high school where food service students prepare and serve lunch.

If you are interested in conducting a tour in your district use the lists of businesses, clergy and civic groups you assembled during your inventory (page 8) to get you started. Consider a card or computer system for keeping track of citizens who have taken the tour, those who want to take it another time and those who are not interested.

Millen suggests a two-card file, one for the individual and one for the business listing all representatives who have taken the tour. The cards should include:

**VANCOUVER SCHOOL DISTRICT**
**"PATRON TOUR" GUEST INVENTORY**

*M* _____ *Spouse* _____
*Title* _____ *Dear* _____
*Firm/Agency* _____
*PO Box* _____ *Address* _____
*City* _____ *Zip* _____ *Term Expires* _____-_____-_____
*Phone* _____ *Suggester* _____ *Date* _____

INVITED FOR: COMMENTS:

_____ _____
_____ _____
_____ _____
_____ _____
_____ _____

Misc. _____
Blue Card _____ Group Assign _____ Bridge Label _____

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*VANCOUVER SCHOOL DISTRICT "PATRON TOUR"*
*FIRMS/AGENCIES*

*FIRM/AGENCY* _____
*ADDRESS* _____
*CITY/ZIP* _____
*TELEPHONE* _____

| *INDIVIDUAL(S)* | *TITLE* | *TOOK TOUR* |
|---|---|---|
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Chapter 5

# Community Education

*Community education, that is, school programs aimed at serving non-parents and other adult citizens, may well be the answer to the "What's in it for me?" question so many non-parents ask.*

"The public school will have to start serving the growing majority of the public—the non-parents—to give them more interest in and confidence in the public schools," says pollster Hubbell.

According to Hubbell, the majority of citizens think public education should offer community education for adults. This finding includes recommendations not only for adult education, or high school completion courses, but also requests for such services as enrichment classes, instruction for upgrading job skills, recreation, senior citizen activities.

Hubbell's research is underscored in reports from the 1981 White House Conference on Aging which found **lifelong learning for self-sufficiency is a necessity.**

"Most of the major problems in the lives of older people—economic security, physical and mental health, social well-being, and using older people as a national resource—can be addressed effectively by *learning* which gives older people the capacity to deal with them. Education is the neglected necessity in dealing with these basic needs of older people."

"Now, however, with this nation very rapidly aging in its demographic profile, it is time to rectify what has become an imbalance. Lifelong learning for adults, and particularly for those older Americans who have so generously encouraged and funded the education of succeeding, younger generations, now deserves and needs increased attention, cultivation, and support."

The conference report does not call upon schools and colleges to meet all of the educational needs of older Americans. The expectation is community organizations, senior centers, churches, libraries, homes, business offices and industrial plants will take part in these educational efforts. However, conferees do see educational institutions, local schools and community colleges, having a "crucial role ... in providing the opportunities we seek."

In the 1800s and in some rural school districts today where student bodies are fewer than 300 and the school is the focal point of the community's social life, serving as a combination town hall, recreation center and general go-to-meeting place, the task of meeting the challenge older Americans have set for schools is relatively simple. In larger communities where so many other agencies and entertainment media compete for people's time, attention, energy and money, the task of meeting the challenge will be far more difficult.

However, school districts with well-organized community education programs can and are leading the way in meeting the entire community's needs for lifelong learning, as well as for community participation.

**In the Charlotte-Meklenburg School System, Charlotte, North Carolina,** the community education office:

- Coordinates the district volunteer program;
- Cooperates with city and county recreation departments for implementation of a $20 million, year-round school/community parks program;
- Sponsors a Big Brothers/Sisters program which includes free admission to all athletic and cultural events systemwide for program participants;
- Maintains community resource files;
- Coordinates community use of school facilities which last year were used almost 180,000 hours by more than 114,000 people representing some 1,900 different community groups.

**In the William Penn School District, Yeadon, Pennsylvania,** a non-profit community evening school, operated by a citizens council appointed by the school board, served more than 1,200 adults in three locations during 1979–80. The citizens council selects courses and hires staff. The school district provides the facilities.

**In the Everett (Wash.) School District,** more than 9,000 residents each term take advantage of community school classes. Seventy percent of those enrolled are non-parents.

The classes include everything from exercise and dance to filing your income tax and estate planning. They are taught by as many as 200 volunteers each term.

Volunteers also work with a paid coordinator to organize programs at the schools and to help with registration. Last year 2,200 residents, many non-parents, volunteered their time for community schools.

All 35,000 households in Everett receive community class schedules three times a year. Until 1981–82, when a $2 registration fee was initiated to help maintain the program despite budget problems, there was no charge for any community school activity.

**1981–82 marks the tenth anniversary of community schools in Salem, Oregon.** Community school in Salem means that a full-time professionally trained coordinator and citizen advisory group is actively implementing six school board approved community school goals:

1. Integration of community resources into the required school curriculum.
2. Extended use of school and community facilities.
3. Development and coordination of optional programs for youth.
4. Development and coordination of optional programs for adults.
5. Coordination and cooperation in service delivery with community agencies.
6. The active involvement of patrons in community decision making.

In 1971 two schools were selected as initial sites. Today, 16 of the district's 37 elementary schools are designated "community schools." District Community Relations Director William J. "Skip" Liebertz attributes the growth and strength of the program to the following factors:

- Strong support from Superintendent William Kendrick, a nationally recognized figure in community education, and from the school board.
- Cooperation from city, county and other agencies who have recognized the advantages of cooperative grants.
- Federal community school grants.
- Ability to hire trained professionals as community school coordinators.
- Emphasis on linking the community in the education of all ages, and particularly the K–12 program.
- Meeting community needs for continued education and recreational services in a community where few public recreational facilities are available.
- Actively communicating with the public about the schools and community schools services and providing opportunities for listening to the community about what these services should be.

Initially Salem's community school programs were introduced to their communities through a series of neighborhood coffees. Residents now receive a tabloid four times a year (fall, winter, spring and summer) with complete information about community school programs at the 16 participating schools. However, Leibertz reports maintaining widespread support for community schools is a continuing effort. To do a more effective job the 16 Salem community school coordinators have formed task forces with specific missions to:

- Improve news media coverage of community school activities.
- Develop one or more radio/TV public service spots to promote community schools.
- Prepare a slide-tape presentation which each coordinator will show to community organizations.
- Design community school posters for distribution to local businesses.

A rotating task force works with the community relations office on the tabloid and a final group is charged with follow-up to make sure all tasks assigned are completed on schedule.

Salem's continuing efforts to increase participation in and expand its community school efforts are paying off. Leibertz reports there are 30 to 40 volunteers working in community school related activities at each of the 16 schools.

Barry Semple, director of the Bureau of Adult, Continuing and Community Education, New Jersey Department of Education, sums up the importance of community education as "an important way to bring parents and other members of the community back into an active involvement with education."

Effective programs in his state have led to at least three benefits, Semple says:

1. Greater involvement of parents and the community is making a difference in student behavior, attendance and test scores.
2. Opening up educational governance to a broader community base which, in New Jersey, is improving public confidence in education.
3. Bringing other agency resources into the schools.

And, many of these contacts in New Jersey, Washington, Pennsylvania and other states are with non-parents who come away feeling there's something more in public education for them than a tax bill.

Chapter 6

# Volunteers

*Volunteers, you say, we have them but they're mostly parents. Non-parents aren't interested.*

Not true! One out of every 10 non-parents in your community is ready to be a school volunteer. That means in a community of 100,000, with 68 percent of the population in that non-parent group, there is a potential of 6,800 volunteers waiting to be asked to serve in your schools.

**Waiting to be asked is the key.** Non-parents won't come on their own. It takes a well-coordinated, well-advertised program to bring them in. And it takes assignments and responsibilities which make the volunteers feel worthwhile and gives them a sense of accomplishment that keeps them coming.

**In Portland, Oregon,** Grandma Flatland has been reading with children in the fourth grade once a week for the past six years.

**In North Carolina,** Governor James Hunt tutors a high school student in math Mondays after his cabinet meetings.

**In Lower Kuskokwim School District, Alaska,** 30 percent of the elected members of the 24 village advisory school boards are non-parents. Ages of the 161 advisory board members range from 20 to 60. Susan Murphy, administrative assistant, attributes non-parents high interest to the power the boards have for local school policy and to the respect for elders in Eskimo culture.

**In Washington, D.C.,** businesses are giving employees time off or are permitting them to work flexible schedules so that they can volunteer to tutor students in reading and math in 40 targeted schools in the District of Columbia.

**In Dallas, Texas,** a senior citizen is working to find other senior citizens to volunteer for a variety of school projects.

"Volunteers are far from a vanishing breed," Gorham Nicol, president of the Board of the Greater Portland (Oreg.) Volunteer Bureau, said in a letter to the *Oregon Journal.* (Oct. 26, 1977)

"Volunteers are increasing; volunteer programs are growing in number and so are the kinds of volunteer jobs that challenge willing and committed citizens.

"What may seem like a 'vanishing act' is really the effect of rapid expansion and change of community services. . . . There are more volunteers, and they are no longer concentrated in traditional places.

*OK, you say, if there is that large a resource of non-parent volunteers in my community, how do I find them and how do I get them into the schools.*

During the '60s and '70s volunteer programs across the country were initiated and expanded as part of federal requirements for grant-in-aid programs. In those years, when funding for schools was more adequate, many volunteer positions became paid positions. Now with financial woes hitting schools nationwide, many of these paid positions are vanishing and the need to bring volunteers back into the schools is again increasing.

Volunteers, especially non-parent volunteers, are willing workers. They will come and come regularly if your school program offers the kinds of opportunities for service they want and need.

The Volunteer Bureau, South Bay-Harbour, Torrance, California, suggests volunteers should be able to answer these questions before they sign on for a volunteer job.

1. What community affiliations and financial support does the agency have? What does that mean?
2. Who is the person designated to coordinate the volunteers program?
3. How will my responsibilities differ from paid staff? Will I be replacing paid staff?
4. What arrangements does the agency have for a trial period on my assignments?
5. Does the agency have a written description of my possible volunteer tasks?
6. What are my opportunities for advancement? Variety?
7. What's required of me in the performance of my duties?
8. What are the channels of communication for suggestions, problem solving and evaluation?
9. What kinds of orientation, training and supervision will I have?
10. How will records of my service be available if needed?
11. And, finally, does the volunteer assignment sound like there's enough in it for me?

Schools can use this check list as they assess current volunteer programs and begin to explore ways to expand them to reach and include the non-parent.

## Charlotte-Mecklenburg

**Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in Charlotte, North Carolina,** recently completed such an inventory of its volunteer program and found non-parent involvement existed, but not to a very great degree. To expand this involvement the school district sought the help of the Chamber of Commerce and local churches. The result: several hundred non-parents from young corporate executives to senior citizens are now familiar figures in Charlotte-Mecklenburg's 108 schools.

Shirley A. Johnson, district community relations specialist, explains how the district achieved its goal:

"A steering committee comprised of representatives from the Community Relations Committee, the media and the school system was formed to develop a plan of action involving:

- **Community dialogues** in each feeder area (school district) to bring school personnel, parents, students and other citizens together to discuss concerns, new state testing programs and plans to assist students who were performing below state academic standards; to determine how the community could help schools meet their stated needs and to solicit volunteers (especially non-parents) to assist in the schools.
- **A media campaign** providing extensive information about each school prior to the dialogues. This information included profiles of the school districts and schools—racial, economic, geographic characteristics; test results; general needs as perceived by the school family; statistical data (number of staff members, number of students, number of exceptional children, number of aides, etc.) and types of volunteer assistance needed.
- **A campaign in the corporate community,** coordinated by the Chamber of Commerce and the Community Relations Committee, to seek release time for employees to work in the schools.
- Expansion of the church-school adoption program and senior citizen volunteer programs.
- Orientation and training seminars for the new volunteer corps.

"The overall campaign was a year in the making, beginning with initial planning in September 1978. The target date for implementation of the new program was September 1979.

"September 1978, through February 1979, was devoted to project planning, school surveys, contacts and meetings with officials in each school district to determine such items as formats for the dialogue.

"From March 1979, through April 1979, the focus was on the media campaign, dialogues in each school district, corporate volunteer program and church-school adoption program.

"During April and May volunteer orientation and training sessions were held.

"Additional recruitments were made during the summer months and the volunteers began working in September 1980."

Johnson reports the volunteers serve in many capacities. "They conduct mini-courses; tutor individual students; serve as Great Books discussion leaders; assist in media centers, offices, health rooms; serve as subject area resources; work with bilingual students; accompany students on field trips and serve as substitute grandparents. Some of the businesses have employees who work in community centers at night and on the weekends giving students individualized instruction in subject areas such as English and math."

"The Housing Authority designated neighborhood assistants in public housing developments to assist schools in decreasing absenteeism among student tenants and other agencies met with school officials to determine how they could be of support."

The result of this community-wide effort Johnson says is that:

- Non-parents were given an opportunity to be heard and to volunteer their services to the schools. During their visits, they learned a great deal about what the schools were trying to do as well as shared their knowledge with the students. These people are now key communicators in their businesses and residential communities.
- The general public was informed about the schools, their strengths and weaknesses, through the cooperative efforts of the local media.
- Area businesses and churches became actively involved through special adoption programs which, in some instances, have surpassed the expectations of the school system.
- The students themselves have gained new friends who show genuine concern, patience and a desire to help them achieve.
- The schools have received assistance in many areas and gained much needed community support.

## Greenville County

**In the Greenville County School District, Greenville South Carolina,** the number of volunteers has almost tripled in just five years, from 5,408 in 1975–76 to 14,956 in 1979–80.

In addition the number of recorded volunteer hours more than quadrupled from 63,971 in 1975–76 to 263,481 in 1979. The volunteers' work saves the Greenville district an estimated $1.3 million annually.

When the Greenville County Schools sought to expand its volunteer program, the district asked a retiring legislative House speaker to serve as honorary chairman of the campaign and enlisted the aid of a school volunteer, a PTA council president, to coordinate a district-wide recruitment campaign.

The campaign included newspaper advertisements, radio and TV spots, bus cards, buttons, bumper stickers, posters, shopping bag imprints, T-Shirts, bill stuffers, circulars and easel-backed showcards for stores, lobbies and libraries.

The theme of the campaign was **"Help Children Learn. Be a School Volunteer."** The theme was used with carefully planned, targeted messages for each of the media used.

Each message also listed a specific job a volunteer might do.

## Washington, D.C.

**In March 1981, when Washington, D.C., Public Schools** needed volunteers to support the newly implemented Student Progress Plan, community organizations, local business and industry, religious institutions and individuals pitched in to help launch an intensive volunteer recruitment program called "Operation Rescue."

In a period of less than four weeks, more than 1,000 volunteers were recruited as tutors in reading and math at 40 target schools. These volunteers provided at least four hours a week of instructional support services to the local schools. In addition, corporations loaned executives to work with the coordinator in this massive recruitment, orientation and placement effort.

**What is remarkable about this city-wide call for assistance is that of the 1,000 tutors recruited, approximately 700 remained with the program for the entire period of the operation and evaluation indicated; of those polled, 93 percent were willing to return.**

Over 50 percent of the tutors were employed and had to program their tutoring hours into their work schedules. Further, many of the target schools are in sections of the city where traditionally it has been difficult to place and retain volunteers who are not residents of the area.

Probably the greatest indication of the success of the program, however, is the support it received from school staff. "Operation Rescue" was a mechanism for the development of a model for providing nonprofessional support for the instruction in a school. It also expanded the perceptions of the role of the community as a direct support in the education process.

Beyond the additional help they received for their pupils, school staff were pleased by the good public relations afforded them by "Operation Rescue." Principals commented citizens whose previous contact with public school had only been through what they read in the newspaper were now able to see firsthand schools are orderly, teachers are teaching and pupils are learning.

**"Operation Rescue" is now in Phase II.** It continues to have a small budget, a small staff and no government funding. According to the *Congressional Record,* Oct. 1, 1981, "the successful implementation of last year's program on short notice with tremendous contribution from the private sector was a clear indication that the community has a wide range of untapped resources which can and must be called on to support public education."

The keys to success in recruiting and retaining "Operation Rescue" volunteers were:

- A well-organized recruitment effort with simple and direct method of application
- A well-planned orientation and training program
- Adequate and appropriate placement opportunities

"Operation Rescue," and the Greenville and Charlotte-Mecklenburg programs are excellent models to use for recruitment efforts.

A telephone call may be all you require for application, but be sure, if you do not have recruits complete an application form, assign someone to record the volunteer's name, home and business address, home and business telephone numbers, and whether or not working in their neighborhood school is a requirement for volunteering.

## Portland

**Portland (Ore.) Public Schools,** suggests this checklist for getting your volunteer program set up:

1. Select a coordinator for your school. Have principal or PTA president make selection. Or, assign someone in the central administration to coordinate the program district-wide.
2. Secure teachers' support and inform them of their responsibility in the program. Take time at a faculty meeting to explain the program. Make sure staff members receive a written outline of their responsibilities for working with volunteers.
3. Poll teachers on help they want and provide forms for requests for volunteer services.
4. Inform the community about the program to recruit volunteers. Do this at a PTA executive meeting, a meeting of room representatives, in a letter to parents informing them of the need for volunteers, at a general PTA meeting, in a school newsletter, and through the local media in press releases and public service announcements.
5. To recruit volunteers use the PTA organization (e.g., room mothers, executive committee) to inform neighborhood communities. Personal contact in recruiting volunteers is more productive than notices or brochures. "Don't forget community people who no longer have children in school, or senior citizens," Freddie Herbert, Portland Schools volunteer coordinator says.
6. Contact and interview volunteers as soon as possible. This includes providing orientation and training sessions.
7. Placement of volunteers is important. In Portland some principals prefer to have school personnel assign volunteers, but many schools leave this to the coordinator who has interviewed and recruited the volunteers. If interviewing becomes too time-consuming a committee could be selected to help.
8. Follow-up on placement in ten days or two weeks to be sure the situation is working satisfactorily for both teacher and volunteer. Make reassignments if there are problems on either side.

9. At the building level, keep a file (recipe box) with a 3″ × 5″ card on each volunteer. Send duplicate of the 3″ × 5″ card (or list of volunteers) to a designated person in the central office. This is important because school accident insurance covers any volunteers who may be injured while serving in a volunteer capacity. A central list of volunteers also permits the district to include them on district mailing lists.
10. Have volunteers sign in and out. You will need this record in case of an accident. A record of volunteer hours is also helpful as you plan ways to recognize and show appreciation for their help.

## David Douglas

Orientation and training are essential steps in guaranteeing volunteer success. Non-parents especially need to know what's expected of them and just how to go about doing their jobs.

Training volunteer tutors is one task of the Reading Assessment Center Coordinator Julie Collins in the **David Douglas School District, Portland, Oregon.**

In two two-hour sessions Collins concentrates on building volunteers' confidence by showing them ways to help students in reading, spelling and math. She stresses communication with teachers and students by using a positive approach in all dealings with students.

Collins gives volunteers tips on how to listen to students read, ways to help them find correct answers, what's expected of students in handwriting, correct letter sounds, practicing math combinations.

She talks about the confidentiality of information about students, the importance of referring discipline problems to the teacher, what facial expressions and body language communicate.

Collins reports volunteers who attend these sessions are attentive, cooperative and eager to learn as much as they can about working with children.

"Volunteers have said how grateful they are for the information, the tips and the time we spend with them," Collins says.

When orientation sessions are over, the volunteers should be given a written guide to take with them to refer to for reinforcement.

**The Menlo Park Elementary School, Portland, Oregon,** has a guide for volunteers listing school expectations:

- Be RELIABLE and always be on time.
- Sign in and sign out each time you come to school.
- Respect the confidentiality of anything you learn in the classroom. Children and their specific problems should not be discussed outside of school. Be professionally discreet. Never publicly discuss parents, children or professionals.
- Discuss student problems only with the teacher with whom you are working.
- Whenever possible, attend in-service training sessions for volunteers at the school. These are planned to help you become a more capable volunteer.
- Realize that your relationship to school personnel requires mutual respect and confidence.
- Recognize that your volunteer contribution sets a fine example of an interested and informed citizen helping to improve the community.

  **Tell your friends about your work. You can be our best recruiter of new volunteers if you share your enthusiasm with others.**

The Menlo Park guide also gives volunteers tips on communication, working with teachers, working with children, and accentuating the positive in their relationships with children, information about the school, lunch times and prices, a building map which shows where to park, and a staff roster.

**Don't forget to let volunteers know about tax benefits they can receive from volunteering. According to the IRS, volunteers can deduct costs incurred for transportation, meals and lodging, out-of-pocket auto expenses, any costs for uniforms or other non-reimbursed expenses they might incur as a direct result of their volunteer assignment.**

And, finally, don't forget to say "Thank you." Programs to show appreciation for volunteers are a **must.**

## Chapter 7

# Reaching Out

*No matter how effective an open house, a tour or a volunteer program you have, you cannot expect to bring everyone in your community into your schools. So for those who won't come to "see for themselves" you will need to take the schools to the community.*

If you believe you have a service the community needs and if you believe you are doing a good job in providing that service, no one will know it unless you spread the word. You have to advertise ... that's right, good old Ivory Soap and Campbell Soup advertising.

## Think Big, Try a Billboard

Mesa, Arizona, students are learning the big picture and residents are learning a lot about Mesa Schools because of a public service program by billboard firm, Gannett Outdoor Group.

The Phoenix branch gave students a year's free use of a 12′ × 25′ billboard to create their own messages and designs about "What's right with education?"

A. Michael Turner, Gannett vice president, sees the project as an opportunity to introduce students to the billboard industry. Joanie L. Flatt, ASPR, public relations consultant, sees the project as an "opportunity to tell citizens some of the good news about public schools in a way the district never could have afforded without help."

According to Turner, about 20,000 persons a day view the student-produced billboard. Six to eight messages appeared during the year at a cost of about $5,000 for space and materials.

Messages repeat the "What's right with education?" theme and answer the questions with statements like: "37,000 children are reading, writing and computing. Every day." and "See for yourself. Visit during Grandparents Week." One board promoted jobs for students.

Before and during levy time in **Central Valley (Wash.) School District,** businesses sponsor billboards which declare "In Central Valley District Education is a Community Affair."

Other school districts are using billboard-style signs to get their messages before the public. A 4′ × 64′ student built billboard along the top of the wall behind Edward H. White High School Stadium in Jacksonville, Florida, identifies the school and district and welcomes freeway travelers who see it to the "Nation's Largest Fully Accredited School System." The sign will soon be replaced with a new one which will tell travelers Duval County is "The Home Of The Most Courteous Students." This part of the district's new campaign to emphasize discipline.

Ann H. Barkelew, ASPR, former public information officer Los Angeles County Schools and now assistant to the president of Munsingwear, Inc., finds **announcement boards outside school buildings** can be as effective as billboards.

As a summer project Burbank High School Principal Robert D. Leland uses the school's announcement board to tell the growing non-parent population in the community some things about his school.

Keeping each message to nine words or less—the guidelines of professional advertising—Leland tells the community:

> BURBANK HIGH STUDENTS HAD RECORD HIGH BASIC SKILLS SCORES/ 432 SENIORS GRADUATED... 194 RECEIVED HONORS... BUT 86 FAILED/ PUPIL ABSENTEEISM—OUR GREATEST PROBLEM... JUST AS IN INDUSTRY/BURBANK HIGH SCHOOL PROUDLY OPENS ITS 72nd YEAR SEPTEMBER 10

According to Barkelew, comments poured in from the community, staff and students. A local judge called to ask if the message about the number of students who failed was a joke. He was amazed and pleased to learn students had to do more than just come to school to graduate. Another community leader responded by saying "Burbank High School has standards."

Traffic slows down at the corner and people admit to going out of their way to read the latest message on the announcement board.

## Use More Than One Medium for Your Message

**In Richmond (Va.) Public Schools,** a multi-media approach to marketing school messages is used.

Each year the district selects a theme and films a 30-second public service message. The message is produced by staff to keep the cost low. It is released to television stations in January when a great deal of public service time is generally available.

The TV spot is supported by other media selected from bus cards, posters, billboards, radio spots and magazine ads, all of which are free on a space available basis.

Several years ago a Western school district collaborated with a local radio station to produce a series of 30- and 60-second public service announcements called the "Sounds of Schools." Each sound—a locker door, a school bell, children singing, reciting, a school bus—was accompanied by a positive message about what was happening in the schools.

The school district's information officer recorded the sounds and wrote the messages. The local radio station recorded them free of charge and, because of their popularity with listeners, played them regularly.

Finding volunteers and helping parents help their students is the theme of a series of radio spots Scotland County, (N. Car.) Schools produced in cooperation with a local radio station. Each day the radio station runs spots to give parents ideas for activities they can do at home to reinforce their child's reading skills. The spots let non-parents know schools are concerned about teaching children to read and also serve as an all-call to the community for volunteers.

## Don't Neglect Newspapers

Since non-parents rely primarily on the mass media—primarily, newspapers—for information about schools, districts can go a step farther to use newspaper coverage creatively.

**Yorba Linda (Cal.) School District** is using its local paper to conduct a novel publicity program entitled "What I Want To Be in 1996 and Why." A newspaper ad features 10 district students with a statement about what the student wants to be.

The objective of the campaign is to promote public appreciation of the importance of schools in preparing young Americans for the working world.

In communities where rising printing and mailing costs are making it prohibitive to distribute community newsletters, schools should consider preparing these publications as **newspaper inserts.** In addition to being more economical, a newspaper supplement can carry more credibility than a direct district mailing, especially with non-parents. With this kind of format it is possible to have advertisers pay all or a portion of the cost. It is even possible that reporters will be assigned to help prepare the copy, especially if the insert has a back-to-school or graduation theme.

Newspapers care about school news because their circulation depends on providing information readers tell them they want. George Gallup, researching reader interests for the American Newspaper Publishers Association, found **news of education to be one of the top three items newspaper readers sought.** Educators should take note and capitalize on their local newspapers' need for education news.

Here is a list of ways Bonnie Ellison, ASPR, public information director for the Northside Independent School District, San Antonio, Texas, suggests schools use to get positive attention for schools in newspapers:

- Stage big events
- Invite famous people
- Invent awards
- Enter contests
- Be the first with fads
- Lend a local angle to national news
- Involve the community to solve a school problem
- Approach the same old thing in a new way
- Take nostalgia trips
- Reverse negative feelings with positive projects
- Provide items to complete collections
- Encourage togetherness
- Take advantage of holidays
- Invite key communicators for breakfast
- Start an alumni office for your school
- Volunteer new story ideas to media representatives

## Pay Attention to District Publications

The media, even though they are the number one source of information about schools for non-parents, are only one means, and by their nature, a limited means of reaching this public. School district publications can be used to supplement what the media have to say about schools.

Research shows well prepared newsletters which tell their communities:

—what's being taught
—what teaching methods are being used
—how school funds are being spent
—how school policies are formed

are effective, if they are published on a regular basis. (Regular is generally considered to be six times during the school year.)

Other kinds of publications can be effective too.

In Broward County, Florida, where schools seek support from a predominately non-parent population which comes primarily from outside the state and has no ties to the local community, informing the public about schools is a challenge. To meet this challenge Jerome G. Kovalcik, public information officer for the School Board of Broward County, put an all-call out to teachers and principals to send articles about effective classroom communication techniques to NSPRA's monthly publication *IT STARTS in the Classroom* with a copy to his office.

So many were received that Kovalcik edited the articles and published a special newsletter. *IT STARTS in Broward Classrooms* typewritten, in an 8½" × 11" format. He distributed copies to barber shops, beauty parlors, professional offices, and anywhere else people might pick them up, including a large local dry cleaners. The proprietor was so impressed by the school's accomplishments, he asked Kovalcik for enough copies with a single hole punched at the top to put on hangers with each customer's clothes.

## Annual Reports

In Columbus, Ohio, where shrinking financial resources have forced the communications department to look to business for services and funds to support public relations projects, producing and distributing the 1980 annual report became a cooperative venture with a local advertising agency, printer and laundry service all donating their services.

The laundry company got into the act when Public Information Officer Robert Grossman discovered the company's towel service stopped at all of the professional offices and businesses where annual reports were to be distributed. Grossman found the service willing to take and distribute the report to all stops along their routes.

## Back-to-School Mailings

**Back-to-school mailings** can be as informative to non-parents as parents, especially if they are combined with a calendar of events or with an eye-catching useful insert like the one designed by John Butterfield, Worthington (Ohio) Schools assistant superintendent, for refrigerator doors in his district. The "fridge foldout" was distributed to every home in the district as an insert in a 12-page back-to-school information booklet.

The foldout includes telephone numbers, bus schedules, holiday dates and a list of members of the board of education. Blanks are left for family members to pencil in extra-curricular activities, teachers' names, parent-teacher organization officers and lunch menus. A large letter "H" on the poster stands for helping at school and leaves space for every resident to fill in volunteer dates.

A savings and loan institution in Worthington provided $3,000 for printing costs. The district paid mailing and labor costs.

## Bill Stuffers

There are times when school districts are required by law to inform the public about new legislation or mandated programs. That was the case J. William Jones, director of information services, faced last year when he was required to let all two million residents of Philadelphia know what the school district was doing to access its buildings and meet the various other employment needs of the handicapped.

"How about a bill stuffer," he thought. The bill stuffer could outline the major components of the handicapped legislation, what the school district was doing to conform, and a hot line phone number residents could call to get additional information.

Jones' next problem was to find someone to distribute the stuffer free of charge. He decided on the Water Department which sends bills to 525,000 customers. The company willingly complied. Cost of the project was $2,400 for printing the flyers.

## American Education Week

**American Education Week** activities planned in your community can help focus non-parent attention on schools and school programs; but these kinds of activities do not have to be planned for only one week in the year.

**Livingston (N.J.) Schools** annually create a "Showcase" of student projects, teacher-made materials, bulletin boards featuring student work, six-foot table displays and continual demonstrations of teaching techniques and equipment for display at the **local shopping mall** for one week in November. The "Showcase" includes elementary and secondary art exhibits, information and handouts about special school programs and candid photos of students at work in the schools.

Besides drawing large crowds the "Showcase" format gives staff an opportunity to interact with the public. Area coordinators without regularly scheduled classes are at the mall during the day to answer questions and give demonstrations. Classroom teachers are there after school. Students are involved in the demonstrations. PTA members, volunteers and senior citizens all join the staff in helping with the project.

## Fair Booth

Take advantage of any parades or fairs in your areas. All community residents feel an identity when their high school band or dance team comes marching by.

A fair booth can give your schools more visibility to more residents than almost any other project you may undertake.

For the past four years, **Roseburg (Ore.) Schools** have had one of the more popular displays at the county fair. Two paid aides begin working with Ed Bouwsema, director of transportation and information services, **Douglas County (Ore.) School District,** in January to design the fair booth, build it and gather displays.

Bouwsema reports the 1981 booth which featured "Roseburg Schools Then and Now" has been one of the most popular efforts. Photographs and memorabilia were featured along with current textbooks and teaching tools. Staff from each district school man the booth and plan student demonstrations for at least half a day during the week-long fair which takes place in July. **Video tapes of school activities, academic, vocational and athletic, are played continually.**

## "Week of the Balloons"

Students in elementary schools in **Westerville (Ohio) Schools** let the entire community know they were reading when the district observed "Week of the Balloons" as its version of "Right to Read Week."

Each student who had read (or had read to him/her) at least five books in three weeks inserted a card in a balloon listing the book titles and his/her name and school.

On the appointed time 2,400 students released their balloons with a grand total of 12,677 book titles listed inside. The event received a great deal of community and media attention. Two students even received letters from families 100 miles away in Moundsville, West Virginia, where their balloons had landed.

## Operation Positive Image

As part of their Operation Positive Image, **Washington, D.C., Public Schools** produced 24 posters featuring students and teachers in action, illustrating the theme: "The D.C. Schools are here to serve YOU." The posters, financed by a grant from the Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation, were displayed in schools, churches, laundromats, shopping centers, business offices and on buses across the city.

### Exhibits of Student Work are Also Popular

For hospitals try a student art contest using younger students. See if a hospital auxiliary would be interested in assisting with materials and ribbons. Use a theme like "What would make me happy if I were in the hospital." Once students have completed their art work, it can be displayed temporarily, or permanently, in the hospital. Teachers will support this kind of effort if it is done at a time when they can tie it to classroom units about health care and hospitals.

For grocery stores try interesting store managers in displays of food-oriented student art or crafts (e.g., macaroni art, nutrition posters, etc.).

Banks, motels, restaurants, chambers of commerce and some department stores have space for displays they are happy to let schools use.

In the **Reynolds (Ore.) Schools** the district art coordinator arranges regular exhibits of student art in banks, business offices and restaurants.

## Speakers Bureaus

Speakers bureaus can be another way of promoting two-way communications with business and other community organizations. One kind of speakers bureau may be a resource list of individuals in your community/area who are willing to come to schools to talk on subjects related to the curriculum.

Generally, there are agencies within your community which will have such lists and you will not need to compile them yourself.

The second kind of speakers bureau is one you will have to organize. This bureau lists members of your staff who have expertise in academic or avocational areas who are willing to speak to community groups.

**When putting your speakers bureau together consider asking all members of your staff to participate—teachers, support staff, administrators, school board members.**

To compile a directory of district speakers, ask each employee to complete a card with name, school, work and home telephone numbers, topics on which they can speak including one line descriptions and an estimated time for their talk, days of the week and times of day they are available to speak. These cards can then be assembled by topic for publication in an easy to read brochure or booklet.

Distribute speakers bureau booklets through churches, business organizations, to civic clubs, garden clubs, and to anyone you know who might need a speaker for a special group. But before you do be sure someone in your district is designated to take calls and arrange and confirm speaker assignments.

## Ask Me!

"Ask Me!" buttons to prompt non-parents to ask about schools are becoming a popular device. Some of those who wear the buttons are prepared to respond with a three-minute speech about what's right with education in their schools. Some school districts prepare a pocket or wallet-sized fact card for "Ask Me!" button wearers to refer to.

In the **Centennial School District, Multnomah County, Oregon** a board member designed a business card with six brief facts about student achievement locally and nationally to hand to those who ask about schools.

## Saying "Thank You!"

Saying "Thank you," or showing appreciation for the help schools receive from volunteers, businesses and others is essential. It also is a good way to find out how well you are doing.

In 1981, **Spokane (Wash.) Public Schools** declared March 30 through April 3 "Appreciation Week." Personal invitations were sent to all volunteers, businesses and community leaders. The information office enlisted the aid of radio stations and used reader boards throughout the community to say "Thank you" to these groups and to invite them to special Community, Business, Volunteer and Staff Appreciation Day celebrations. The celebrations were held at individual schools and at receptions in the district's new administration building.

Those who were invited came and the response to Appreciation Week activities was enthusiastic according to the tally of survey cards guests were asked to complete.

**Clark County (Nev.) School District** devoted an entire issue of the district newsletter in January 1981, to say "Thank you" to those who serve in schools as volunteers. The issue also announced that the district would be surveying residents to test their "understanding and awareness of the information services provided by the district."

In the **Everett (Wash.) School District,** the PTA sponsors an annual "Golden Acorn Award." Each school attendance area gives a Golden Acorn Award pin to a citizen of the area whose service to schools has been "above and beyond the call of duty. Non-parents are among the recipients," says Jo Love Beach, district public information director.

In the **David Douglas School District, Portland, Oregon,** letters of congratulations are sent to parents of graduating seniors. **An invitation is included to those who are graduating their last child to keep in touch with the schools.** Each year from 20 to 25 **new non-parents** return cards requesting their names be kept on district mailing lists.

## Answering Questions and Critics

Answering questions and critics is an essential part of school-community relations which has special significance when dealing with a non-parent who has little or no knowledge about the system or how it works. Many school districts are responding to citizens' needs to know about their schools with "hot line" or "fact line" numbers. When these numbers are well-publicized, districts find non-parents will call almost as frequently as parents.

A "hot line" or "fact line" is a phone number anyone can call to communicate a question, concern, suggestion or complaint about the school system and receive an immediate response. Installing such a system provides several benefits:

1. It helps to surface and dispel rumors.
2. It saves time of other offices in the organization who normally get the calls.
3. It reduces the "bureaucratic run-around" by making reliable information readily available and by referring people with concerns to people who are prepared to respond positively and promptly.

**Columbus (Ohio) Schools suggests the following procedure for establishing a successful "fact line" service:**

- Have the information office establish specific goals, objectives and procedures for a fact line.
- Identify staff, facilities and materials needed. In Columbus, one full-time staff person was assigned to the service. Volunteers were trained to take most calls received by the service.
- Through the phone company, the district can arrange for an easy to remember number for the service. **In Columbus it's 221-FACT.** The phone company also helps districts determine the number of lines or stations needed for the service.
- **Establish the information system.** All departments should be directed by the superintendent to supply information on their services and operation to the fact line. Departments should also be required to update this information in a timely fashion.
- **Publicize the service.** Be prepared for success. Once the credibility and knowledge of the service is established calls will increase.

### Internally you can:

- Put fact line information in newsletters and staff bulletins.
- Post the fact line number on bulletin boards, in hallways, lounges and offices.
- Send telephone stickers to all parents.

### Externally you can:

- Distribute press releases to media and encourage feature stories.
- Offer question and answer columns for local syndication.
- Include the fact-line number on all official documents, stationery, brochures.
- Use billboards, bus cards, posters sponsored and paid for by local businesses.

### Operation:

- Establish regular hours and be sure there is always a trained person present to answer phones.
- Keep a written record of all calls. The person taking the call should record the content and disposition of the call.
- Be prompt. The paid staff person should be responsible for most necessary follow-ups. Follow-ups should be made promptly, preferably the same day.
- Stay current. Information should be updated frequently. Establishing and maintaining credibility is essential.

## When a Critic Calls

You will find, as you get out of your schools, into your communities and invite the public to call you, critics of public education will insist on having their say. Among the non-parent group you may find more brick bats than bouquets until **you have spent time changing attitudes.**

Part of changing these attitudes will depend on how you deal with critics and their complaints.

*Communication Briefings*, a monthly idea source for public relations people, suggests that you are not going to convert critics. The best you can expect to achieve is to have them understand your point of view.

It also states it is not necessarily best to agree with a critic. "It depends on the situation and the critic. By agreeing with him or her, you could get boxed in."

*Communications Briefings* suggests the following nine points to remember when confronted by a critic:

1. Listen even when it hurts. Attempt to understand precisely what the complaint is all about.
2. Don't argue. You'll make the critic sharpen his criticism and an emotional climate could develop.
3. Repeat what the critic says to clarify the complaint. Use a phrase such as "Do I understand that what you are saying is?"
4. Find out whether the complaint is the result of a perception or of a fact.
5. Determine if the critic is a loner or a spokesperson for a group.
6. Answer the criticism when you understand the complaint thoroughly and when you've done your homework. Often this means getting back to the critic.
7. Include illustrations and examples in your answer.
8. Avoid long-winded answers; they can destroy interest and create hostility.
9. Use language the critic can relate to. Avoid jargon or technical terms.

Any critics who can leave your school or office feeling they were welcomed, listened to attentively, made to feel their ideas were of value and their opinions important, will accept a final decision much more gracefully than if treated otherwise. These people will also return to the community with far better things to say about the way their schools are administered.

Frances Powell, director of community relations for the **Union School District, Tulsa, Oklahoma,** suggests boards take preventative action for dealing with pressure groups which will emerge in community from time to time:

## Dealing With Pressure Groups

- Formulate fair board policies governing use of facilities, distribution of pamphlets and brochures, speakers, participation of students and employees in contests or promotions conducted through the schools, the relationship of the educational system to other groups, and procedures to be used for complaints or to request changes in curriculum, textbooks or operations.
- When such policies are used as a standard over a period of time, board members and administrators are less subject to sudden emotional pressures spawned by narrowly defined interest groups. The fair implementation of such policies also checks accusations of poor planning or the use of "hip pocket policy."
- Prepare a time on the board agenda during which the public may address the board. Some groups simply want an opportunity to be heard. By allowing them this courtesy board members and school administrators may prevent an explosion of pent-up frustration at some later time.
- Educate your board members to the proper methods of conducting public hearings. While the board and the administration should always listen to individuals and/or groups with courtesy they should never engage in an exchange with those addressing the board.
- Board members and administrators should maintain open channels of communication with all publics to ensure they're not hearing only those groups with limited viewpoints or who may be acting on bias.
- Educate board members, administrators and other employees to the importance of maintaining good relationships with community groups. Stress courteous communication as the key to good relationships.

For further information on pressure groups, see *New Voices on the Right: Impact on Schools.* (Published by NSPRA)

## Cable Television: A New Voice for Schools

Cable television is bringing schools into the living rooms of parents and non-parents in ways not possible a few years ago. Citizens in communities which have cable TV franchises with educational channels or commitments to educational programming are learning more about their public schools just because they have television sets, says Jane McKinney, ASPR, director of public information, **East Lansing (Mich.) Public Schools.**

For five minutes each day, East Lansing residents with cable television can find out what's happening in the schools. The district uses its typewriter-like character generator, located in the public information office, to transmit brief messages onto the television screen. The messages run continually unless interrupted for programming. They include school board agendas, reports of board action, school closings due to weather, calendars of events, program news, student and staff honors and special announcements.

In this direct communication line to the community East Lansing Public Schools are showing students in action in such activities as a science class, art exhibit, concert, sports event or drama excerpt.

East Lansing Schools' Cable Channel 24 was made possible in the franchise agreement between the city and National Cable Company which provides at no cost to the schools: one exclusive channel for general viewing; equipment necessary to deliver audio and telementary signals; two closed circuit channels; one cable drop in each building; and a "reasonable amount of maintenance and service."

The cable staff includes a program coordinator and inservice project producer. A member of the high school English Department teaches the TV class and McKinney supervises.

With the equipment the district now has the district presents programming from 7:00 to 9:00 each weeknight schools are in session and on special request.

There are no Neilsen ratings yet for school programming on Cable TV, but the phones at **Port Arthur (Tex.) Independent School District** start ringing if the school menu does not appear.

School Board members in **Danville (Ill.) School District,** where meetings are carried on cable TV, know they have a loyal audience, according to Bob Iverson, administrative assistant to the superintendent.

Chapter 8

# Senior Citizens: A Special Case or Are They?

*It's a fac: schools can no longer bury their heads in the sand and ignore. Our population is not only predominately non-parent, it is steadily growing older. The 1980s and 1990s will be characterized by the emergence of an affluent, highly-educated, middle-aged consumer market which will be a powerful force for economic and social change, according to futurist and strategic planner David Snyder.*

Each day 5,000 U.S. citizens celebrate their 65th birthdays; 25 million people (11 percent of the country's population) are over 65 years old.

As a group, citizens over 65 are generally vigorous and independent. According to the report on Lifelong Learning for Self-Sufficiency from the 1981 White House Conference on Aging they are concerned with:

- **Surviving** or economic sufficiency which includes access to satisfactory employment to augment their incomes.
- **Coping** or learning practical life skills to enable them to solve their daily problems flexibly and resourcefully.
- **Giving** which translates into community participation to help the nation and their communities cope with mounting social and economic problems. This participation, they feel, will give them a more creative role in society. (School districts should note that this participation already exists. **As voters senior citizens comprise the most conscientious of the voting groups in our society.**)
- **Growing,** by which they mean becoming a fuller human being through adequate opportunities for lifelong learning.

Those over 65 generally are not interested in programs or products they feel label them as "older." Come up with something that makes sense to older people and they will buy it or participate, says the Swiss Society for Marketing Research. Advertise your product or service as an item for senior citizens and you can

expect it to languish on the shelf or very few to participate, the society's studies show.

Frances P. Larkin, gerontology consultant, suggests in *Communications Briefings*, Vol. 1, No. 1, senior citizens do have some special needs which communicators should respect.

She suggests:

- Using larger print for letters.
- Using posed rather than action photos of seniors.
- Speaking loudly and clearly and slowly when talking to a group of older people.

But she warns communicators should avoid the following pitfalls when dealing with senior citizens:

- Don't patronize or treat them like children.
- Don't stereotype. Many market segments exist among senior citizens. Consider them a young-old audience, many of whom are vigorous and healthy.
- Don't consider all senior citizens poor; they aren't.
- Remember that for every 69 men over 65 there are 100 women.

While senior voters are conscientious about voting, they cannot be written off as a totally negative factor in school elections. John Nellor, special assistant to the superintendent, Portland (Ore.) Public Schools, discovered in a 1975 study of Portland voters. **Older voters tend to vote in the same pattern as the total population if they are informed about the issue, Nellor says.**

Consequently, schools, if they are to inform older citizens about their programs, problems and needs can capitalize on the research by bringing older citizens into the schools as volunteers. Being a volunteer is an important service to their communities and can offer opportunities for lifelong learning and enrichment.

Even though senior citizens may not respond well to campaigns which single them out as being older, they are a target market which schools must identify and make a special effort to reach.

Seven years ago a neighbor brought Mrs. Alice Flatland to meet her child's teacher at Menlo Park School in a suburban Portland, Oregon, school district.

Mrs. Flatland had been talking with her neighbor about finding something to do. She had also talked with her neighbor about how much she enjoyed children. Her neighbor put the two together and suggested she volunteer to help at school. Mrs. Flatland wasn't sure. She didn't know what she could do to help and she wasn't sure the school would want her.

She loves her job as volunteer and comes faithfully for two hours each week to listen to students read. She is a favorite with the students, present and past. They call her Grandma Flatland and are anxious to have her help them.

But Grandma Flatland seems to need more reassurance than most volunteers that her services are needed. At the beginning of each school year she calls the same teacher to ask, "Am I needed this year?" The teacher's response, of course, is, "Yes."

A story about Grandma Flatland in the district's newsletter brought another senior volunteer to the school, but not until the volunteer had asked her neighbor, a parent at the school, to check with the principal to see if she really would be welcome and if there really would be something for her to do.

## Hire One, Recruit One

Hiring a retired person to recruit other retired volunteers is the way the **Dallas (Tex.) Schools** have solved the problem of making senior citizens more comfortable about coming to school. The Senior Volunteer Coordinator works out of the Community Relations Office and is responsible for Dallas' Older Volunteers in Education (DOVE) program. She goes to nursing homes and other places to find senior citizens willing to volunteer and then brings them to the schools.

In Dallas these volunteers come to schools as role models for younger students. "Some make bean bags for elementary classes. They do a variety of things and love being around the kids. Many of them have no families to care about them and they are glad to have the involvement with youth," says B. Rodney Davis, director of information services.

Programs of sharing talent and time between schools and nursing homes can be especially rewarding.

ABC's *Good Morning America,* Christmas Day 1981, featured students from Gilbert Heights Elementary School in the David Douglas School District, Portland, Oregon, and their adopted grandparents at Graystone Manor Convalescent Center.

Students at the school have been sharing holidays and visiting with nursing home residents for the past year. In return, residents who are able, come to the school each Tuesday to work on projects and to visit in classrooms. This year, seven classrooms adopted grandmas and grandpas from among the residents who are not able to come to the school.

According to Doris Cameron, counselor and school coordinator for the program, interest in the program has built as more teachers become acquainted with the residents who visit the school and through the positive experiences they have had taking their classes to visit the center. She also reports students are visiting their senior friends on their own time.

In **Ann Arbor, Michigan,** "grandpersons," as Martha Mehta, special correspondent to the *Christian Science Monitor* calls them, are participating in an innovative Teaching-Learning-Communities (T-L-C) project which mixes those over 60 with those under 16 and matches skills and abilities of the older citizens with the interests and ideas of the children.

The two groups have produced several hundred projects in fine arts, graphics, crafts, woodworking, carpentry, photography, filmmaking and pottery as well as weaving, rug hooking, lacemaking, music, movement, reading, storytelling, gardening, flower arranging and plant care, Mehta reports.

"Ann Arbor's grandpersons come from single dwellings, public housing, retirement and nursing homes. They are multiethnic, of every social background and occupation and range in age from 60 to 87. Most grandpersons spend half-day sessions at school either once or twice per week."

**"The T-L-C project is built on two beliefs: all grandpersons are 'givers' of an important human and historical connection and each grandperson is a distinct individual with important skills" to share with children, Mehta quotes Project Director Carol Tice as saying.**

"Who can provide love and affection better than the experts —grandmothers and grandfathers?" asks a brochure published by the Prairie Norton Elementary School, Columbus, Ohio, to describe its grandparent program. The program is a cooperative venture between the school and local senior citizens.

According to the brochure, teachers plan flexible schedules for grandparents. "Even though they are scheduled on a specific day, the 'experts' are invited to drop in at any time. After all, love and affection work as well on a moment's notice as they do in scheduled doses."

Grandparents in that community enjoy sharing children's successes, listening to them read, playing games with them, reading stories to them, showing appreciation for their talents and achievements, giving them hugs and kisses and doing "other things which grandparents do best." *(IT STARTS in the Classroom,* Dec. 1975.)

The designation "grandparent" is one schools are finding is a label to which senior citizens have no objections. In fact, as one grandmother put it, "We care—just as much as parents do—sometimes more." She also pointed out grandparents like to be included.

This grandmother wishes her granddaughter's school would:

- "Invite me to school or classroom activities to which her parents are invited as a matter of course.
- Send me a note, too, when she does something nice you inform her parents about.
- If you have a classroom newsletter, put me on the mailing list.
- Ask me if I have any skills I could share with my granddaughter and her classmates, or with other students.
- Give me an opportunity to buy copies of her school photographs" (*IT STARTS in the Classroom,* Dec. 1975).

It is, perhaps, for reasons like these grandparents willingly respond to Grandparent Days at school.

To build his mailing list for Grandparents' Day, the principal at Ventura Park Elementary School, in a suburban Portland, Oregon, school district, sent a letter home with each student and asked parents to list the names and addresses of grandparents, or neighbors their children could adopt as grandparents, to invite to school. The principal then sent letters to all names returned inviting them for lunch and a school concert. **Over 100 grandparents came.**

Eight years ago, when Joyce Rice, public information coordinator for **Webster (N.Y.) Central School District,** asked members from three senior citizen clubs to spend a day at school during American Education Week, 40 citizens came.

The day included a tour of the district with stops at the 1890 School House, the district's museum, and the newest junior-senior high school. The senior citizens were served a turkey dinner at an elementary school and visited classrooms. All guests received a bag of small advertising gifts solicited from local businesses. The day was a success and as a consequence the district has made it an annual event.

In 1979, over 300 senior citizens came for their day at school. The turkey dinner is now at the high school where students enter-

tain the guests. In addition local merchants are donating 30 to 40 door prizes as well as items for the bag of advertising gifts.

Webster Central School District is also one of virtually thousands of districts across the country which offer senior citizens free admission to school activities. This is done by issuing retired citizens some type of gold card pass. These passes entitle holders to everything from free admission to the high school play, a football game or the swimming pool to reduced prices for spaghetti dinners or school lunches, to free courses in the district Community Education program or adult school.

Joyce Rice publishes a regular column called "Golden Age Notes" in the district's community newsletter.

**Bellingham (Wash.) Public Schools** posts monthly notices of school activities of interest to retired residents in Senior Centers and senior housing developments or apartments in the area.

Senior Citizens are invited to be guests of **Montgomery County (Md.) Public Schools** at plays, concerts, sports events and other activities through 17" × 22" calendars of events printed with 12-point type. The calendars are published monthly October through May, and are distributed throughout the county by the Division of Elder Affairs. The calendars encourage residents to call for further information and reservations. It also lists the schools where events will take place with addresses, phone numbers and a contact person.

## Rent-a-Kid

High schools through their career programs can reach out to older residents through "Rent a Kid" programs which match student services with senior needs at a reasonable price; or through such classes as horticulture or construction where students can do pruning, yard work or make minor repairs for class credit. Food service programs which run restaurants should make a special effort to include senior citizens among their clientele.

One community used this service approach to successfully change attitudes about school taxes and school support. **DeSoto (Mo.) School District calls it "Operation Circuit Breaker."**

In Missouri a "circuit breaker" law provides tax rebates to those over age 65. But residents this age in DeSoto were not taking advantage of the law. Superintendent Fred E. Bradley discovered this fact when he analyzed the organized effort by senior citizens to defeat a tax increase for schools.

With Dorothy Wilson, a mother of six with a strong belief in schools, as coordinator and with cooperation from the Missouri Department of Revenue, the district organized teams of students to help senior citizens complete and file the appropriate forms for tax relief.

As a result of "Operation Circuit Breaker," Bradley reports:

- Senior citizens, after being helped personally by students, had a new appreciation of the value of education for the entire community.
- Claims completed by trained students generally contained fewer errors and omissions than those completed by the senior citizens themselves. This helped the Department of Revenue process the claims and spoke well for the district's education program.
- Students, often isolated from the elderly of their community, were exposed to the realities of their existence and gained a new appreciation and empathy for these citizens and their problems.

Schools are also reaching out to senior residents to find out about the history and traditions of their communities.

## Foxfire Curriculum

One of the best known models for this integration of community history and tradition with the curriculum comes from **Rabun County High School, Georgia,** where English teacher Eliot Wigginton incorporated the knowledge and traditions of the community elders in what has come to be known as the Foxfire Curriculum.

"Wigginton wanted to put life into the curriculum, break the endless drudgery of lectures and deadly tests. He began to meet with students after school to learn about their lives. He talked with their parents and grandparents about their traditions and way of life. He discovered not only how self-sufficient these people were but that their traditions and survival skills might well be forgotten unless they were recorded. This sparked the idea for the Foxfire Magazine and became the language arts curriculum. The magazine serves not only to record tradition but as a vehicle for teaching interviewing techniques, writing, editing and commu-

nication skills," according to the *EDUCATION USA* Special Report *Good Schools: What Makes Them Work.*

Similar programs, based on the Foxfire model, are underway in at least 150 other rural communities, according to *Good Schools.*

When **Frederick (Colo.) Junior High School** eighth graders wanted to study their community, past and present, they sought help from the entire community. The local newspaper published an invitation for residents to join the project. Students became visible throughout the community as they:

- Took a census of the community to compare with a census taken 75 years ago and to study population trends.
- Interviewed business people about the history and future of business.
- Designed and received approval for an historical mural for the school's gym wall.
- Dug clay in the area and reproduced Indian pottery in designs local Indian tribes had used.
- Produced a documentary about the project and the history of the area.
- Explored the importance of coal mining in the development of the area and related it to current energy alternatives.
- Conducted tests of water and soil to determine problems and study possible solutions.
- Traced their family backgrounds and the roots of the community.
- Traced land ownership of certain parcels of land for the past 100 years.
- Prepared a directory of available community services for local distribution.
- Tape-recorded interviews with early residents and collected old photographs for publication in an historical booklet.
- Compared the old with the new.
- Worked to keep the community informed about the progress of their project.

Needless to say, the whole community became involved. Newspapers followed the project's progress and the local television station featured it on the evening news. The project not only enriched the school's curriculum but also raised the community's awareness and appreciation for schools.

## Chapter 9

# Evaluation: Is It Working?

*Communication is by definition two way. To be complete it must go full circle with the message sent interpreted and acted upon by the receiver so that the sender has feedback on how well the information was received and used.*

In many of the suggestions made for reaching non-parents a simple tally will tell how many people acted upon the information they received. All that's required for a tally is to count the number of volunteers who respond to a call for help, or the number of people in a week who call a fact-line number.

If goals or targets are set in planning events, (like Columbus [Ohio] Public Schools' goal to bring 50,000 visitors to the schools during 1980–81), a measure of the program's success will be how close the schools come to reaching the mark.

**Informal feedback,** a constant as you increase efforts to involve non-parents, will be another measure of your program's effectiveness.

Key communicator networks can be used as effectively to get feedback on a particular issue as they are to relay information about schools.

You can also sharpen your listening skills by having switchboard operators and school secretaries briefly record the kinds of calls or questions a district or office receives. Often questions will come as a result of a communication sent from the schools. This check will let you know just how clear, or effective, that communication has been.

Ads for services or "Talk Back" forms in school publications can give some feedback on how well read the publication is.

Banach suggests placing 4″ × 6″ "I Have a Question" cards in key locations around the district. They will be effective if you promise people who complete them that they'll receive an answer within 24 hours of receipt of the card and they do, Banach says.

Or, he suggests, use the same size card headed "I Have an Idea" to ask how residents would improve the schools. Again, Banach says, their effectiveness will depend on getting back to

those who complete cards within a reasonable length of time. Banach suggests you do it within seven days of receipt of the card.

For more *formal feedback* be sure to have a simple survey form at **every activity you hold in your schools** to give you immediate reaction from participants about the event.

A survey similar to the one used by the Vancouver (Wash.) School District in conjunction with their tours, (see pages 25–26) can be adapted to many school activities.

A reaction as simple as "What did you like best?" or "What did you like least?" or "What would you suggest to improve this activity?" is all that is required for an honest reaction you can use to assess an activity's success.

**Single issue surveys** conducted periodically and targeted at different key non-parent audiences can give you more scientific feedback about how well you are doing. This kind of surveying can be done by mail, by telephone or in personal interviews.

If you did a formal community survey as part of your initial research on non-parents in your community, plan to repeat it to find out how their attitudes and levels of information have changed as a result of your campaign.

Remember, the feedback you get and the evaluation you do is essential to improving the effectiveness of your communications. It is the only way there is to determine if you are making progress in reaching the ultimate goal of turning non-parents into school supporters through firsthand experiences with schools and accurate information about them.